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background notes

Syria

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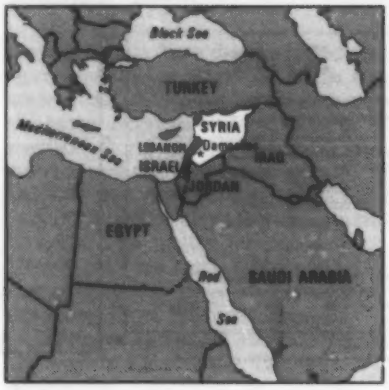

Official Name: Syrian Arab Republic

PROFILE

People

Nationality: *Noun and adjective*—Syrian(s). **Population** (1985 est.): 10.5 million. **Annual growth rate:** Unknown. **Ethnic groups:** Arab 90%, Kurds, Armenians, Circassians, Turks. **Religions:** Sunni Muslims 70%, other Muslim sects 16%, Christians 13%, some Jews and Yazidis. **Languages:** Arabic (official), English (widely understood), French, Kurdish, Armenian. **Education:** *Years compulsory*—primary, 6 yrs. *Attendance*—94%. *Literacy*—78% males, 58% female. **Health:** *Infant mortality rate*—42/1,000. *Life expectancy*—66 yrs. **Work force** (3.1 million): *Agriculture*—32%. *Industry and commerce*—29%. *Services (including government)*—39%.

Geography

Area: 185,170 sq. km. (71,500 sq. mi.); about the size of North Dakota. **Cities:** *Capital*—Damascus (pop. 2,083,000). *Other cities*—Homs (790,000), Aleppo (1,857,000). **Terrain:** Coastal zone with a narrow double mountain belt enclosing a depression in the west, deserts, and a much larger eastern plateau. **Climate:** Predominantly dry, about three-fifths of the country has less than 25 cm. of rain annually.

Government

Type: Republic, under socialist regimes, since March 1963. **Independence:** April 17, 1946. **Constitution:** March 12, 1973.

Branches: *Executive*—prime minister (head of government). *Legislative*—People's Council. *Judicial*—Supreme Court.

Administrative subdivisions: 13 provinces and city of Damascus (administered as a separate unit).

Political parties: Arab Socialist Resurrection Party (Ba'th), Syrian Arab Socialist Union, Unionist Socialist, Arab Union Socialist Party, Communist Party of Syria. **Suffrage:** Universal at 18.

Central government budget (1985): $8 billion. *Current expenditures*—$4.35 billion. *Development projects*—$3.6 billion.

Defense (1985): 30% of government budget.

National holiday: Independence Day, April 17.

Flag: Comprises a red band (top), a white band (center) with two stars, and a black band (bottom).

Economy

GDP (1984, expressed at "parallel rate"—see official exchange rates below): $13.9 billion. **Annual growth rate:** Unknown. **Per capita GDP** (parallel rate): $1,388.

Natural resources: Crude oil, phosphates, chrome and manganese ores, asphalt, iron ore, rock salt, marble, gypsum.

Agriculture (17% of GNP): *Products*—cotton, wheat, barley, sugar beets. *Arable land*—48%.

Industry (22% of GNP): *Types*—mining, manufacturing, construction.

Trade (1984): *Exports*—$1.35 billion: petroleum, textiles, phosphates, tobacco, fruits and vegetables, cotton. *Major markets*—Romania, Italy, France, USSR. *Imports*—$3 billion: petroleum, machinery and metal products, textiles, fuels, foodstuff, especially grain. *Major suppliers*—Iran, Libya, FRG, France, Italy.

Official exchange rates (Syrian pound): *Official (primarily governmental transactions)*—3.9 S.P. = US$1. *Parallel (primarily commercial transactions)*—5.4 S.P. = US$1. *Tourist (used for an increasing percentage of commercial transactions)*—8.25 S.P. = US$1. *Offshore (unregulated, as of 12/31/85)*—about 14 S.P. = US$1.

Fiscal year: Calendar year.

Membership in International Organizations

UN and some of its specialized and related agencies, Arab League, Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), Nonaligned Movement, Group of 77, International Olive Oil Council, Interparliamentary Union, International Whaling Commission, World Tourist Organization, INTELSAT, Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), World Federation of Trade Unions.

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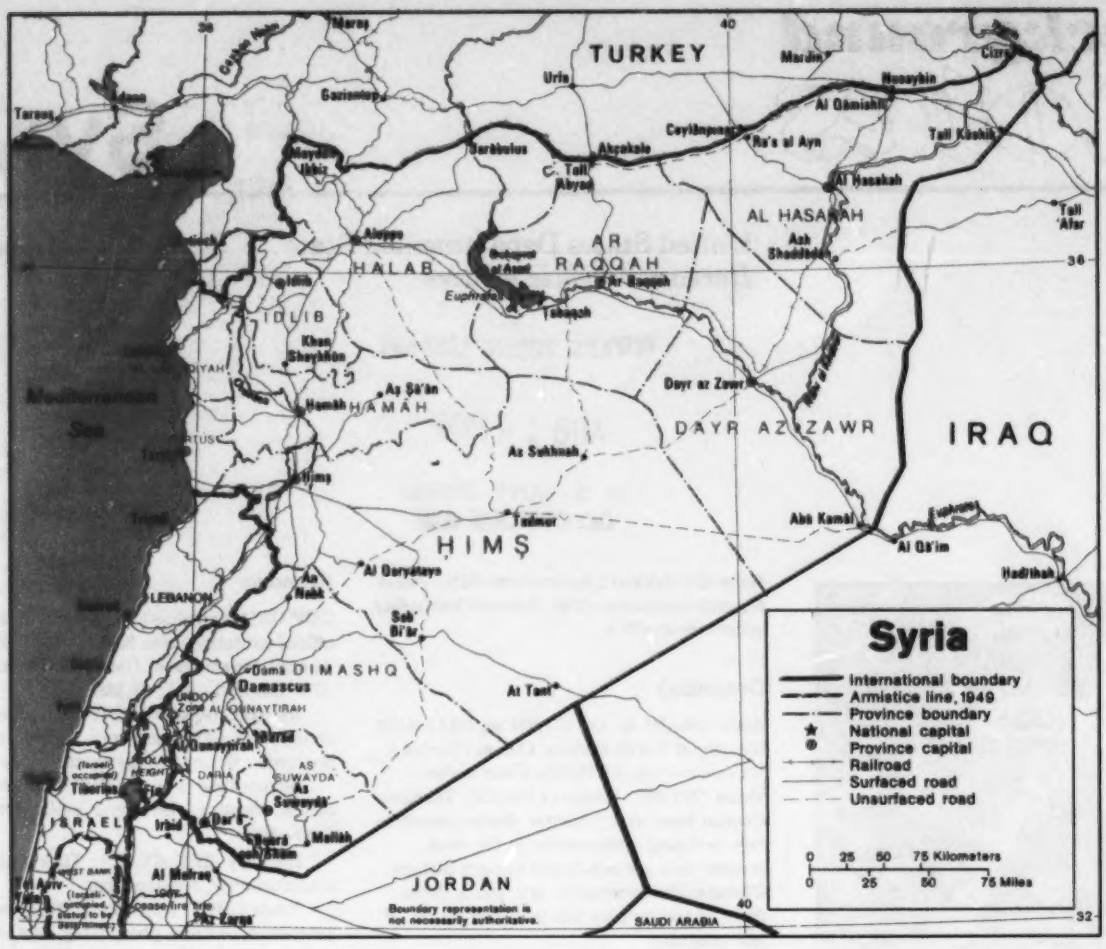

GEOGRAPHY

The most prominent topographic features in Syria are the Anti-Lebanon and Ansariyah Mountains, which parallel the Mediterranean Sea from Israel to the Turkish border; the Euphrates River valley, which traverses the country from the north to the southeast; the Jabal al-Druze Mountains in the south; and the semidesert plateau in the southeast. The eastern side of the Anti-Lebanon Mountains is dotted with valley oases, the largest of which is the site of Damascus.

The climate can be compared to that of Phoenix, Arizona; summer days are dry and hot, with mean maximum temperatures above 27°C (80°F). From December to March, the weather is quite cold but seldom reaches freezing. Precipitation is about 76 centimeters (30 in.) annually along the coast, decreasing to less than 25.4 centimeters (10 in.) in the eastern desert area. The rainy season generally lasts November–April.

PEOPLE

Ethnic Syrians are of Semitic stock. The population is 86% Muslim, with the Sunnis constituting a majority. Other Muslim groups include the Alawi, Shia, and Druze. Some 120,000 Armenian Christians live in Syria, and the Jewish community is about 4,000.

Arabic is the official language. Many educated Syrians speak English or French, but English is the more widely understood. Aramaic, the language of Jesus, is still spoken in two villages.

Most people live in the Euphrates River valley and along the coastal plain in the west, a fertile strip between the coastal mountains and the desert. Overall, population density is about 42 persons per square kilometer (109/sq. mi.).

Education is free and compulsory from ages 6 to 11. Schooling consists of 6 years of primary education followed by a 3-year general or vocational training period and a 3-year academic or vocational program. The second 3-year period of academic training is required for university admission. Primary- and university-level enrollments are expanding rapidly. The Syrian Government encourages students to study abroad but discourages emigration of educated people. Literacy for Syrians aged 10 and older is 78% for males and 58% for

females. Adequately trained teachers and suitable facilities are scarce.

Syria's cultural and artistic achievements and contributions date from ancient times. Archaeologists have discovered in and around the ancient city of Ebla extensive writings and evidence of a brilliant culture rivaling those of Mesopotamia and Egypt. Later, Syrian scholars and artists contributed to Hellenistic and Roman thought and culture. Zeno of Sidon founded the Epicurean school; Cicero was a pupil of Antiochus of Ascalon at Athens; and the writings of Posidonius of Apamea influenced Livy and Plutarch.

Syrians were among the earliest Christians; they later contributed to Arabic literature and especially to music. Although declining, the world famous handicraft industry still employs thousands.

HISTORY

Archaeologists have demonstrated that Syria was the center of one of the most ancient civilizations on earth. Around the newly excavated city of Ebla in northern Syria, a great Semitic empire spread from the Red Sea north to Turkey and east to Mesopotamia from 2500 to 2400 B.C. The city alone during that time had a population estimated at 260,000, and the many tablets found there promise to yield considerable information about this civilization.

Syria was occupied successively by Canaanites, Phoenicians, Hebrews, Aramaeans, Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians, Greeks, Romans, Nabataeans, Byzantines, and, in part, Crusaders, finally coming under the control of the Ottoman Turks. Syria is also significant in the history of Christianity—Paul established the first organized Christian Church at Antioch, the city from which he left on many of his missionary journeys.

Damascus, settled about 2500 B.C., is one of the oldest continuously inhabited cities in the world. It came under Muslim rule in A.D. 636. Immediately thereafter, the city's power and prestige reached its peak, and it became the capital of the Omayyad Empire, which extended from Spain to India from A.D. 661 to 750, when the Abbasid caliphate was established at Baghdad, Iraq.

Damascus became a provincial capital of the Mameluke Empire around 1260. It was largely destroyed in 1400 by Tamerlane, the Mongol conqueror, who removed many of its craftsmen to Smarkand. Rebuilt, it continued to serve as a capital until 1516. In 1517, it fell under Ottoman rule; the Ottomans remained for the next 400 years, except for a brief occupation by Ibrahim Pasha of Egypt from 1832 to 1840.

French Occupation

In 1920, an independent Arab Kingdom of Syria was established under King Faysal of the Hashemite family, who later became King of Iraq. However, his rule ended after a few months following the clash between his Syrian Arab forces and regular French forces at the battle of Maysalun. French forces then occupied the country in accordance with a League of Nations mandate.

With the fall of France in 1940, Syria came under the control of the Vichy government until the British and Free French occupied the country in July 1941.

Continuing pressure from Syrian nationalist groups, however, forced the French to evacuate their troops in April 1946, leaving the country in the hands of a republican government that had been formed during the mandate.

Independence—1970

Although rapid economic development followed the declaration of independence on April 17, 1946, Syrian politics have been marked by upheaval. After the overthrow of President Adib Shishakli in 1954, successive army shakeups brought Arab nationalist and socialist elements to power.

Syria's political instability during the years after the 1954 coup, the parallelism of Syrian and Egyptian policies, and the appeal of Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser's leadership in the wake of the 1956 Suez crisis created support in Syria for union with Egypt. Following their merger into the United Arab Republic on February 1, 1958, all Syrian political parties ceased overt activities.

The union was not a success, however, and Syria seceded following a military coup d'etat on September 28, 1961, reestablishing itself as an independent state—the Syrian Arab Republic. Instability characterized the next 18 months, with various coups culminating on March 8, 1963, in the installation by leftist Syrian Army officers of the National Council of the Revolutionary Command (NCRC), a group of military and civilian officials who assumed control of all executive and legislative authority. The takeover was engineered by members of the Arab Socialist Resurrection Party (Ba'th Party), a previously clandestine political movement that had been active in Syria and other Arab countries since the late 1940s. The new Cabinet was dominated by Ba'th members.

The Ba'th takeover in Syria followed a Ba'th coup in Iraq the previous month. The new government explored the possibility of federation with Iraq, now governed by the Iraqi branch of the Ba'th Party, and with Egypt. An agreement was concluded in Cairo on April 17, 1963, for a referendum on unity to be held in September 1963. However, serious disagreements among the parties soon developed, and the tripartite federation failed to materialize. Thereafter, the Ba'th regimes in Syria and Iraq began to work for bilateral unity. These plans foundered in November 1963, when the Ba'th regime in Iraq was overthrown.

In May 1964, President Amin Hafiz of the NCRC promulgated a provisional constitution providing for a National Council of the Revolution (NCR), an appointed legislature composed of representatives of mass organizations (labor, peasant, and professional unions), a presidential council (in which executive power was vested), and a Cabinet.

On February 23, 1966, a dissident group of army officers, acting in the name of the Ba'th Party and favoring a more leftist policy, carried out a more successful coup d'etat, imprisoned President Hafiz, dissolved the Cabinet and the NCR, and abrogated the provisional constitution. The coup leaders described it as a "rectification" of Ba'th Party principles.

The traumatic defeat of the Syrians and Egyptians in the June 1967 war with Israel weakened the socialist government established by the 1966 coup. Shortly after the 1970 defeat of Syrian forces during the "Black September" hostilities with Jordan, Minister of Defense Hafiz al-Asad effected a bloodless coup, ousting the civilian party leadership and assuming the role of prime minister.

GOVERNMENT

In 1971, Hafiz al-Asad was elected president by a public referendum. In May 1971, he formed the National Progressive Front, led by his ruling Ba'th Party, to broaden the base of his government and to give expression to various political views.

The Syrian electorate approved a new constitution overwhelmingly on March 12, 1973. The constitution had been drafted by the 173-member People's Council, an organization appointed by Asad and the National Progressive Front in 1971. The constitution was followed by parliamentary elections.

The constitution vests the Arab Ba'th Socialist Party with the leadership functions in the state and society and provides broad powers to the president. The president, elected for a 7-year term by universal suffrage, is also secretary general of the Arab Ba'th Socialist Party and leader of the National Front. The president has the right to appoint ministers, to declare war and states of emergency, to issue laws (once passed by the People's Assembly), to declare amnesty, to amend the constitution, and to appoint civil servants and military personnel. Along with the National Progressive Front, the president decides issues of war and peace and approves the state's 5-year economic plans. The National Progressive Front also acts as a forum in which economic policies are debated and the country's political orientation is determined. For the most part, the front lacks any effective power, as it is dominated by the Ba'th Party. It serves more as an instrument by which President Asad's regime co-opts the non-Ba'th political parties.

In many ways, the permanent constitution differs little from the provisional constitution, which had been in force since 1964. One important change is the omission of the statement that Islam is the religion of the state; however, Islamic jurisprudence is required to be the main source of legislation, and the chief of state must be a Muslim. The judicial system in Syria is an amalgam of Ottoman, French, and Islamic laws, with three levels of courts: courts of first instance, courts of appeals, and the Court of Cassation, the highest tribunal. In addition, religious courts handle questions of personal and family law.

Syria is divided administratively into 13 provinces and the capital city of Damascus, which is administered separately. Each province is headed by a governor, whose appointment is proposed by the Minister of the Interior, approved by the Cabinet, and announced by executive decree. The governor is assisted by a provincial council, of which three-fourths of the members are freely elected and one-fourth are appointed by the Minister of the Interior and the governor.

The current 35-member Syrian Cabinet, dominated by the Ba'th Party, was appointed by President Asad on April 8, 1985.

Principal Government Officials

President—Hafiz al-Asad
Vice President for Foreign Affairs—'Abd al-Halim Khaddam
Vice President for Security Affairs—Dr. Rif'at al-Asad
Vice President for Educational and Cultural Affairs—Muhammad Zuhayr Mashariqa
Prime Minister—'Abd al-Ra'uf al-Kasm
Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense—Lt. Gen. Mustafa 'Abd al-Qader Talas
Deputy Prime Minister for Economic Affairs—Dr. Salim Yasin
Deputy Prime Minister for Services—Dr. Mahmud Qaddur

Ministers
Economy and Foreign Trade—Dr. Muhammad al'Imadi
Finance—Dr. Qahtan al-Siyufi
Foreign Affairs—Faruq al-Shara'
Interior—Muhammad Ghabbash
Information—Yasin Rajjuh
State for Planning—Dr. Sabah Baqjahji

Ambassador to the United States—Rafic Jouejati
Ambassador to the United Nations—Dia Allah el-Fattal

Syria maintains an embassy in the United States at 2215 Wyoming Avenue, NW., Washington, D.C. (tel. 202-232-6313).

POLITICAL CONDITIONS

The traditionally leftist Syrian Army has played a key role in the government. The lineup of factions within the army often has been the controlling element in the changes of government.

The Ba'th platform is proclaimed succinctly in the party's slogan: "Unity, freedom, and socialism." The party is both socialist—advocating state ownership of the means of industrial production and the redistribution of agricultural land—and revolutionary—dedicated to carrying a socialist revolution to every part of the Arab world. Its founder and philosophical leader is Michel 'Aflaq, a Syrian Christian who was removed from authority in the 1966 coup. The party also has attracted supporters of all faiths in other Arab countries, especially Iraq, Jordan, and Lebanon.

President Asad's government has held power longer than any other Syrian Government since independence. His survival is due partly to the craving for political stability shared by many Syrians as well as to his government's success in giving many previously disadvantaged groups (such as religious minorities and peasant farmers) a greater stake in society. The expansion of the government bureaucracy has created a large class owing its position to Asad. His survival is due also to the army's continued loyalty and the effectiveness of Syria's large internal security apparatus, both of which are now heavily comprised of Asad-appointed members of his own Alawi sect.

Despite large turnouts at the polls, most of the Syrian electorate remain apathetic toward the current regime. In the last 10 years, evidence of dissatisfaction with and opposition to the Asad regime has been apparent.

Commercial and urban elements, whose power and status have been eroded by the Ba'this and their policies, constitute part of the opposition. Although a number of leftist groups oppose the regime, the arch-conservative Muslim Brotherhood provides a more significant challenge to the government. The fundamentalists reject the basic values of the secular Ba'th program. They also object to Alawi-dominated rule, which they consider heretical.

Opposition to the present regime has been expressed violently. In June 1979, more than 60 army cadets, most thought to be Alawites, were massacred. Anti-Ba'th demonstrations erupted in Aleppo in March and April 1980. The largest and most threatening show of opposition occurred in Hamah, in February 1982. In response to a government crackdown on clandestine arms depots, the Sunni fundamentalists ambushed Syrian security forces and staged a general insurrection. The revolt was crushed after forces loyal to Asad leveled parts of the city with artillery fire, causing thousands of casualties. Relative calm has prevailed since the spring of 1982.

ECONOMY

Syria's economy has from the beginning been founded on the twin pillars of agriculture and commerce. Although much of southern Syria is semi-arid, the north, with the Euphrates, other small rivers, and greater rainfall, is well-endowed for cultivation, especially of grains and cotton. Meanwhile, Syria's cities, particularly Damascus and Aleppo, have always owed much of their

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stature to the commerce passing through them. The highly refined commercial skills and dynamism of their inhabitants assure Syria of a continuing large fund of talent upon which to draw in developing its economy.

The economic orientation of the Syrian Government is rigidly socialist. Shortly after it assumed power in 1963, the Ba'th Party undertook a massive land reform program and nationalized all major industry and foreign investment in Syria, leaving only small enterprise, including farming, in private hands. In the years since, state enterprise has served as the primary engine of development. An expanding web of price and exchange rate controls, marketing restrictions, and import and export regulations encumber private enterprise.

Under President Asad, the Syrian Government has made large strides in expanding economic infrastructure and developing traditionally neglected rural areas. Land reform has enhanced opportunity for rural peasants. The improvement in roads, railroads, ports, electricity, irrigation, and other essential components of economic development has been dramatic. In addition, the government has worked to extend education, health care, and other social services to rural areas. Restrictions on consumption provoke continuing dissatisfaction from Syria's middle class but are justified by the government as necessary to free resources for capital formation and maintenance of the large military establishment required to defend Syria from hostile neighbors.

Overall, the Syrian economy is badly depressed. Government-controlled production is poorly managed and uncompetitive. Syria exports little except raw materials. Individual initiative—historically one of Syria's most valuable assets—is not actively encouraged. Private sector imports are severely restricted. Foreign exchange is in short supply. The Syrian Government officially controls all trading in and out of Syrian pounds, and employs a cumbersome three-tier exchange rate system, which has resulted in an active offshore foreign exchange market.

Although private capital flight is a critical problem, the government continues to mobilize funding for an ambitious development program. Infrastructure is expanding, and production of government-approved commodities is rising steadily. Epidemic "brain drain" and capital flight are symptoms of problems stemming from ineffective economic management.

Macroeconomic Trends

According to available statistics, which are not fully reliable, Syrian gross domestic product (GDP) continues to rise steadily. It reached $15.1 billion (at parallel rate) in 1984, slightly over half accounted for by the public sector. Gross domestic investment is estimated to have been $3.4 billion in 1983, two-thirds by the public sector, one-third by the private sector. Inflation is reported as moderate. Employment statistics are generally unavailable; rural-to-urban migration has disrupted traditional employment patterns to some extent, but it does not appear that unemployment is considered a major problem.

Given the large volume of unsanctioned internal trade and imports into Syria, the foregoing statistics cannot be considered as definitive. GDP and investment (much of the latter abroad) is thought to be more than what is actually reported. Most observers believe that inflation is also much higher than the government statistics acknowledge. During the latter half of 1984 and 1985, when the offshore rate for the Syrian pound declined by 70%, inflation certainly rose substantially.

Development Plan and Budget

Syria is currently approaching the end of the 1981–85 development plan period, and the government has initiated work on the 1986–90 plan. No details are yet available, but public statements of President Asad and the policymaking Ba'th Party Regional Command indicate that priorities will include completion of already initiated infrastructure projects (roads, railroads, electricity production and transmission, natural gas production), and expansion of agricultural production and agroindustry.

Foreign Trade

Syria's balance of trade remains heavily in deficit. Official statistics show 1984 imports at $3.0 billion and exports at only $1.35 billion, a deficit of $1.65 billion. The actual deficit, including unsanctioned trade (virtually all of which is inward-bound), may be twice that amount.

Prospects for improvement do not appear strong. Discovery of promising new oil reserves in eastern Syria may begin to relieve the situation somewhat within the next year or two. However, even with optimistic production projections, export of this oil would not eliminate the current trade deficit. Meanwhile, talk by the Syrian Government about promoting exports appears to be having little effect. Oil exports alone accounted for 63% of Syrian exports in 1984 (and were still 16% less than oil imports). The only other significant export was cotton (15%).

Foreign Grant Aid

Following the Camp David initiative, the October 1978 Arab summit in Baghdad pledged support payments to Syria, Jordan, and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) if they agreed to reject the Camp David accords. The "Baghdad payments" have been an important source of income for Syria. Syria's allotment was set at $1.8 billion per year. In fact, only a few countries, notably Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, have maintained regular payments under the agreement. As a consequence, Syria is receiving only $700–$800 million per year in Baghdad agreement aid.

Since the spring of 1982, when Syria aligned itself with Iran in the Iran–Iraq war and closed the Kirkuk-Homs pipeline through which Iraq was transporting the bulk of its oil exports, Iran has provided to Syria a reported 6 million tons per year (approximately 120,000 barrels/day) of crude oil for refining in its refineries. One million tons per year is provided free of charge (the "free oil" mentioned in the Syrian Government budget); Syria is supposed to pay near-commercial prices for the remaining five million tons. In fact, Syria has not made regular payment for that oil, and Iran agreed in mid-1984 to reschedule almost $1 billion in oil payments due. Given Syria's continuing foreign liquidity shortage, it also appears doubtful that it will succeed in making the rescheduled payments.

Worker Remittances

In part encouraged by depressed economic conditions in Syria, a large number of Syrians have sought employment outside the country, both in the oil-producing countries of the Arabian Peninsula and in Western Europe and the United States. Many expatriate workers continue to return a portion of their earnings to Syria. Government balance-of-payments statistics show private unrequited transfers to Syria in 1983 of $334 million. Much more significant is the flow of such remittances through black-market channels, where they reportedly constitute the largest continuing demand for Syrian pounds. It is likely that remittances through this channel are at least $500 million–$1 billion per year. Although it is impossible

Travel Notes

Health: Many US- and European-trained doctors practice in Damascus. Most Damascus hospitals and clinics can handle emergency cases; however, the city is not well equipped for major surgery and long-term hospitalization.

An antique sewerage system and informal refuse disposal procedures require precautions to guard against endemic diseases. Local dairy products are considered unsafe, and local fresh milk should be boiled or pasteurized.

Clothing: Damascus is a fashion-conscious city, although styles are somewhat conservative by US standards. Excessively revealing or tight-fitting clothing is not suitable for streetwear, particularly in the *souq* (market) areas. In the summer, washable suits are useful. In winter, light- to medium-weight wool clothes are suitable.

Transportation: Air service is available from Damascus to major European cities. Syrian Airlines serves most Arab capitals and also flies to principal Syrian cities. Schedules are sometimes erratic.

Transportation between cities in Syria and in neighboring countries can be arranged by private "service" taxis or by air-conditioned buses. Taxis, distinguished by their red license plates, are frequently used by Americans. The fare depends on the particular trip but is not high by American standards. Public transportation is also provided by trains and buses.

Telecommunications: The automatic-dial telephone system used in Syria is of fair quality. Some delays can be expected on long-distance calls, which can be placed to most cities in the area. Reception on international calls varies greatly. Cable and wireless services are available at all points, but service is not always reliable. Damascus is seven time zones ahead of eastern standard time.

to know for certain, worker remittances are probably declining in tandem with falling oil revenues on the Arabian Peninsula.

Agriculture

Agricultural production is largely in private hands. However, the government has established a monopoly over many commodity collection, processing, and distribution activities. For example, farmers are required to sell to the government grains enterprise all the wheat they produce except that intended for local consumption. Private transportation of grain outside the place of origin is prohibited. Grain is ground in government mills.

To date, this system has not functioned efficiently. In 1984, the government enterprise acquired only 12% of estimated total wheat production. The remainder was consumed locally, fed to animals, processed illegally, or allowed to spoil. Such inefficient resource allocation is even more of a problem in the case of more highly perishable commodities such as fruits and vegetables.

DEFENSE

President Asad is commander in chief of the Syrian Armed Forces, which comprise some 400,000 troops and substantial numbers of reservists. All males serve 30 months in the military upon reaching the age of 18. About 30,000 Syrian soldiers serve in Lebanon under an Arab League mandate to enforce security. The Soviet Union has long been the principle source of training and materiel for the Syrian Armed Forces. The two countries signed a 20-year treaty of friendship and cooperation in 1980, and the Soviet Union increased military assistance to Syria following Israeli victories over Syrian forces in Lebanon in 1982.

FOREIGN RELATIONS

Despite Syria's radical pan-Arab rhetoric, President Asad emphasizes Syria's national interests. Ensuring national security, increasing influence among its Arab neighbors, and regaining the Golan Heights are primary goals. Promoting pan-Arabism is a priority only insofar as it will help foster other Syrian national goals.

Although ideologically President Asad purports to be nonaligned in the East-West confrontation, Syria depends on Soviet military equipment and technical assistance, and is host to about 5,000 Soviet advisers. Relations between the two countries were strengthened by the 20-year treaty.

Relations With Other Arab States

Syrian-Jordanian relations have been tense in recent years. Syria repeatedly has accused Jordan of giving sanctuary and support to the Muslim Brotherhood. In November 1980, a showdown between the two countries nearly erupted into war. Syria has rejected possible joint Jordanian-Palestinian negotiations with Israel on Middle East peace. Nevertheless, in late 1985, Jordan and Syria undertook efforts to improve relations and exchanged visits of high-level delegations.

Syria also has implicated the Ba'th Party in Iraq as an active supporter of the fundamentalist Muslim Brotherhood. Syria supports Iran in the Iran–Iraq war that broke out in September 1980, when Iraq invaded western Iran.

Egyptian President Anwar Sadat's initiative in November 1977 and the subsequent signing of the Camp David peace accords led to severance of Syrian-Egyptian diplomatic relations and Syrian endorsement of economic and political sanctions against Egypt.

Involvement in Lebanon

Lebanon and Syria maintain close cultural, economic, and political ties. Lebanon's 1975 civil war prompted the Arab League to establish, at Lebanon's request, an Arab Deterrent Force, of which Syrian troops were the major component. Following the Israeli invasion into Lebanon in the summer of 1982, there was a serious engagement between Syrian and Israeli forces in eastern Lebanon. U.S. Ambassador Philip Habib negotiated a cease-fire in Lebanon and the subsequent evacuation of PLO fighters from West Beirut. Syrian opposition effectively blocked implementation of the May 17, 1983, Lebanese-Israeli accord on the withdrawal of foreign forces from Lebanon. Following the withdrawal of the UN Multinational Force from Beirut in February 1984 and the subsequent departure of the bulk of Israel's forces from southern Lebanon a year later, Syria launched a major initiative to reconcile warring Lebanese factions and to establish a permanent cease-fire.

The Arab-Israeli Conflict

Syria was an active belligerent in the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, which resulted in Israel's occupation of the Golan Heights and the city of Qunaytrah. Following the October 1973 war, which left Israel in occupation of additional Syrian territory, Syria accepted UN Security Council Resolution 338, which signaled an implicit acceptance of Resolution 242.

As a result of the mediation efforts of former U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger in May 1974, a Syrian-Israeli disengagement agreement was reached, enabling Syria to recover territory lost in the October war and part of the Golan Heights occupied by Israel since 1967.

Syria has repeatedly denounced the Camp David peace process and has expressed strong reservations concerning President Reagan's peace initiative of September 1, 1982. It supports the Arab League's Fez plan for a Middle East settlement.

Tensions between Syria and Israel have increased since Israel officially annexed the Golan Heights in December 1981 and as both sides have sought to further their goals in Lebanon.

U.S.-SYRIAN RELATIONS

Formal diplomatic relations between Syria and the United States, which the Syrians had severed in June 1967, were restored in June 1974, on the occasion of former President Richard Nixon's visit to Damascus. U.S.-Syrian relations thawed for a short time thereafter, particularly in the commercial and economic fields.

After a lapse of 9 years, the United States resumed economic assistance to Syria in fiscal year 1975, focusing on support for Syria's development, particularly in the agricultural and transportation sectors.

Syria's adamant rejection of the Camp David accords, support for international terrorism, and close friendship with the Soviet Union led Congress in 1983 to prohibit any new assistance, and since 1979, no new aid has been obligated. Despite continuing policy differences, both the United States and Syria recognize the importance of a strong dialogue and have sought to maintain the channels of communication, despite policy differences.

Principal U.S. Officials

Ambassador—William L. Eagleton, Jr.
Deputy Chief of Mission—David M. Ransom
Political Officer—C. David Welch
Economic Officer—William N. Witting
Commercial Attache—John C. Clarkson
Consular Officer—Ronald L. Schlicher
Administrative Officer—Alton R. Baysden
Public Affairs Officer—Albert W. Dalgliesh, Jr.
Defense Attache—Col. Michael W. Totten

The U.S. Embassy is located at Abu Rumaneh, Al Mansur St. No. 2; P.O. Box 29 (tel. 333052, 332557, 330416, 332315; telex 411919 USDAMA SY). ■

Further Information

These titles are provided as a general indication of material published on this country. The Department of State does not endorse unofficial publications.

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